



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Five rescued from mudflats on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson

CAMP DENALI, Alaska—What started off as a fun evening for a couple who went off-roading on the back roads of Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, on the evening of Saturday, Oct. 19, turned into a rescue mission that ended up with five saves for the 210th and 212th Rescue Squadrons of the Alaska Air National Guard.

"A husband and wife took a jeep off-roading on Route Bravo Road and got stuck in the mudflats," said Master Sgt. Richard Matteson, a battalion chief with the 673rd Civil Engineering Squadron, Fire and Emergency Services Flight, U.S. Air Force.

Realizing they were unable to get their vehicle out of the treacherous mudflats, the couple put out a call for help on Facebook, explained Matteson. Good Samaritans responded to the plea for help, but soon found themselves stuck as well.

The situation soon became dangerous when a high tide reaching up to 30 ft. came in around 8 p.m., Matteson said. The occupants of the first jeep abandoned their vehicle when the rising tide submerged it. They took refuge in the second jeep, stuck further back in the mud.

Matteson, along with security forces personnel, responded to the scene and began to evaluate what the best course of action was. There, Matteson facilitated the incident commander role and began directing the effort to extract the stranded people.

Further complicating the rescue effort, the drivers had unknowingly entered a munitions impact area. The risk of encountering and potentially detonating unexploded ordnance would factor in how the rescue mission would unfold.

In order to reach the vehicles, explosives ordnance disposal personnel would have to clear a route to reach them, Matteson explained.

"We thought about leaving them in the vehicles for the night until EOD could clear a route, but the five-year-old boy began showing signs of hypothermia and we knew we had to get

them out of there,” said Matteson. “Our biggest concern at that point was getting them out as soon as possible.”

The tide had risen to the doors of the second vehicle and water began flooding in, Matteson explained.

“We started working an egress plan for them, but because of the UXO, the only possibility of getting them out was by helicopter extraction,” said Matteson.

At 9:40 p.m., the 11th Air Force Rescue Coordination Center accepted a request for support from the Alaska State Troopers, who had been notified by the fire department on JBER.

The 210th Rescue Squadron launched a HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopter with two Guardian Angels from the 212th Rescue Squadron from JBER at 11:12 p.m.

Once over the scene, the rescue team hoisted the four adults and one child out of the vehicle and flew them to the hospital on JBER, where they were released without injuries to medical personnel.

For their part in the rescue mission, the 210th and 212th Rescue Squadrons were awarded five saves.

The next morning, the two abandoned vehicles were towed out of the flats after EOD personnel from the 673rd Civil Engineering Squadron cleared a safe route to and a 500 ft. buffer around the vehicles, said Matteson.

“The biggest thing is you have to know where you’re at,” said Matteson. “You should always know if you’re in a safe and opened area, and you need to be prepared. It would not have been such an issue if they had some kind of survival kit, but they only had on jeans and T-shirts, which was a recipe for disaster in this situation.”

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